

Dear Artie,

Each year I think of going to the Asilomas Conference, and always put it off -- too far, too much money for a peasant like me, etc. However, when I saw you were speaking, I signed up right away -- hope to be there to cheer you on.

I'm enclosing a copy of the letter I wrote to "farmer to farmer," a publication that goes out to most of the sustainable agricultural community. I had mentioned that I was a farmer as well as union member. They listed only the UFW affiliation, which would make it easy for some farmers to dismiss the message, but the message is all summed up in the title listed for your talk -- seeking dignity and respect. How is that any different from what I and most of the participants in this conference are seeking. As family farmers, we know that the economic and marketing structures of this society are heavily weighted against us. If riches were our only, or even primary, goal, we wouldn't be in this type of farming, and certainly not trying to balance the interests of the water, land, air, and biodiversity of the natural systems, as major considerations when we make "business" decisions. Many of us have a less than capitalistic view of private property, that we are stewards - owners here temporarily and with the blessings of God to "use" this little piece of territory, and then pass it on to the community in as good or better shape than when we received it.

The community you will be speaking to can be eloquent in defense of wild life and rivers and wetlands -- why shouldn't they / we show that respect to the farm workers, who are in fact the most vital partners in making the farm productive. Abraham Lincoln once said he would choose to be neither a master nor a slave. In the Asilomar audience will be many who choose farming, like me, but do not subscribe to the agribusiness code of ethics, in which labor is a commodity like irrigation water or equipment -- minimize costs, maximize production, through away the old equipment for more productive new models.

Another perspective is economic. If family farmers let agribusiness set the "Prevailing wage" for farm work as the lowest and most degraded of work in society, then that is what my hour is worth when I'm out there in the mud or sun, pruning my own vines or picking my own fruit. Of the working farmers at this conference (half will be white shirts, "advisors," professors, and gov. employees), many will be *Workers in their own fields*. I take pride in the fact that I planted every palm on my farm, that almost every date we sell passes through my fingers. However, my daughters are embarrassed that I refer to myself as a peasant. Are any of Cesars Grandchildren interested in doing farm work? It is a profession that is held in very low esteem. Probably no school counselor or parent would urge his kids to CHOOSE farm work, and yet why shouldn't planting seeds or pruning vines or picking fruit have the same respect and honor as shuffling papers and talking on the telephone? We're feeding the rest of the world!!

Gallo, Pandol, Pavich, and various other old adversaries may be there. They may have chosen "organic" because it is a niche market, good for marketing. The idea

they offer farmers is riches and comfort -- you can be like us, operate from an air - conditioned office or pickup -- give orders to others to do the work -- shuffle papers and talk on the phone and go to the country clubs and complain about aliens and people who don't want to work like the good old braceros of yesteryear. They have chosen to be masters. Many at the conference would reject that ideal. Dignity and respect -- as good a goal for fellow farmers as it is for farm workers -- we're all in this together.

Give my best wishes to Helen and the family.

I'll be looking forward to cheering you on in Asilomar.

Viva la Cousa
Doug Adair
"Pato"

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